DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 897 CG 013 688

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TITLE Marital Adjustment Correlates in Young Couples.
PUB DATE 29 Mar 79
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southeastern Psychological Association (25th, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 28-31, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment Problems; Behavior Patterns; *Emotional Response; Life Style; Marital Instability; *Marriage; *Personal Adjustment; *Sex Differences; *Spouses
IDENTIFIERS *Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale

ABSTRACT

The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale was administered to 35 Caucasian, Protestant couples who were married an average of nine years, largely middle class, and lived in Knoxville, Tennessee. Significant correlates of marital adjustment were organized into groups of similar variables. Correlate groups that were the same for the husband and wife included: (1) the couple is emotionally secure (both low in anxiety); (2) the husband is emotionally expressive and the wife is emotionally receptive; (3) the wife is not working and seems to enjoy her housewife status; (4) the husband and wife are religious and somewhat traditional in values, with the wife somewhat quiet and conventional. In addition, the husband's higher socioeconomic status seems to make the wife feel more economically secure and the husband's marital adjustment is positively affected by higher job satisfaction and feelings of future economic security. Sexual intercourse frequency seems to be positively related to the number of siblings the husband and wife had and their continued need for high rates of interaction, and the degree of husband dominance. Results suggest that traditional values concerning sex roles, a high husband's socioeconomic status, emotional expressiveness by a husband, and high couple emotional security all contribute to a couple's marital adjustment. (Author)

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Marital Adjustment Correlates in Young Couples

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Paper presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans, March 29, 1979.

Abstract

Wesley Burr, John Scanzoni and others have extensively studied the area of marital adjustment. Each theorist has suggested a limited theory involving a few variables that are proposed to influence marital adjustment.

The present research involved a number of tests of personality and interpersonal adjustment, along with variables measuring attitudes and background. The variables were correlated with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale. All measures were administered to 35 Caucasian, Protestant couples who were married an average of nine years. The couples were largely middle class and lived in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Significant correlates of marital adjustment were organized into groups of similar variables. Correlate groups that were the same for the husband and wife included: (1) the couple is emotionally secure (both low in anxiety); (2) the husband is emotionally expressive and the wife, emotionally receptive (e.g., the husband enjoys giving affection and the wife enjoys receiving it); (3) the wife is not working and seems to enjoy her housewife status; (4) the husband and wife are religious and somewhat traditional in values, with the wife somewhat quiet and conventional. In addition, the husband's higher socioeconomic status seems to make the wife feel more economically secure (confirming a theory of John Scanzoni), and the husband's marital adjustment is positively affected by higher job satisfaction and feelings of future economic security.

Although some theorists have argued that frequency of sexual intercourse is related to marital adjustment, this research found minimal relationships (for husbands, .14; for wives, .10). Sexual intercourse frequency for this sample seems rather to be positively related to (1) the number of siblings the husband and wife had and their continued need for high rates of interaction; (2) the degree of husbanddominance.

The study thus suggests that traditional values concerning sex roles, a high husband's socioeconomic status, emotional expressiveness by a husband, and high couple emotional security all contribute to a a couple's marital adjustment. These findings must be viewed cautiously in terms of generalizability, both because of the small sample size and the fact that the research was done in a culture where traditional sex roles may be expected and valued. But the research does suggest several hypotheses worth testing in future large-scale research.

The subject of marital adjustment, or happiness, has long been studied, but with mixed results. Hicks and Platt (1970) state that no more than 33% of the variance has been explained in any one study. Glenn and Weaver (1978) found that almost none of the major variables previously related to marital happiness were significant in a national opinion survey they analyzed. Most research has been hurt by problems of small sample size, by researchers' treating happiness as a couple variable rather than an individual variable, and by significant social desirability bias found related to marital adjustment in the few studies that have attempted to measure social desirability (Hawkins,,1966; Miller,, 1975).

Hicks and Platt (1970), in a review of the literature, distinguish between two marriage types. One is the institutional or tradition-oriented marriage, where the husband contributes financial and other instrumental support, and the wife mainly contributes to the couple's expressive needs. Variables related to this marriage type which have been linked to higher marital satisfaction include the husband's education, income and educational status . Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1976) suggest that a husband's higher educational level leads to higher income, which leads to a wife's feeling higher economic satisfaction, causing her to feel higher empathy, companionship, and physical affection. Hicks and Platt suggest that other variables contributing to instrumental marriages' happiness are the wife's accurate perception of her husband and his needs (positive relationship), and the wife's employment when required by finances but not her choice (negative relationship). Klemer (1971) and Tsipora Peskin (in Horn, 1976) also suggest a wife's high self-esteem and independence seem to contribute negatively to marital adjustment, while moderate self-esteem may make a positve contribution.

The second marriage type Hicks and Platt describe is the companionship marriage where the degree of affection, sexual enjoyment and companionship are most important. Related to this marriage type, Hicks and Platt report better marital adjustment tends to correlate with higher emotional involvement and high communication of feelings.

The present study was an attempt to study in depth the correlates of marital happiness for both husbands and wives, with added control for social desirability. The criterion variable was the Kimmel and Van Der Veen (1974) modification of the Locke- Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale.

Method

Subjects in the sample were 35 Caucasian couples, largely middle-class, of Protestant religious preference, and with the wife in the 28- 33 age group. They were interviewed and tested in their homes, in Knoxville-Knox County, Tennessee, and took a series of personality and attitudinal measures for about 1-1 1/2 hours.

The 35 couples were chosen from 93 responses to a one page questionnaire sent to 693 young married women randomly chosen from the Knoxville-Knox County voter rolls (the remaining 58 respondents were excluded because they were either non-Caucasian, non- Protestant, or the wife was older or younger than the age group above). Five dollars was offered as compensation to participants for their participation in a study of "marriage, childrearing, and family planning attitudes and values."

Subjects were seen in their homes as a couple, most in the evening. They were given a series of paper and pencil tests following a discussion of how they would solve specific problems in childrearing. Many subjects seemed to have attitudes ranging from tolerance to enjoyment of the tests, with most asking the experiemnter to stay on after the testing for conversation on various personal concerns, and most rejected any monetary compensation for study participation.

Personality and interpersonal scales given to husbands included the FIRO-B (Schutz, 1966), which has individual and compatability measures on inclusion, control and affection, with measures of how much each husband likes to give (expressed) or to receive (wanted) each of these three interpersonal behaviors. Other scales given were the overt anxiety scale (Cattell & Scheier, 1963); an alienation scale (Groat & Neal, 1967); male and female stereotyped trait adjective self-concept scales (broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, and Vogel, 1970); a need achievement scale (Mehrabian, 1968); a dogmatism scale (Troldahl and Powell, 1965); a scale on whether "a woman's place is home" (Cautley & Borgatta, Note 1); and a social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). The scales were preceded by the couple's engaging in a discussion of how they would deal with some typical childrearing problems (Biller, 1969), which has been used as a measure of interpersonal dominance. Women were given a number of the same scales, including those measuring marital adjustment, the FIRO-B, overt anxiety, alienation, male and female stereotyped traits in one's self-concept, dogmatism, and social desirability. They were alos given scales measuring sex role ideology values (Travis & Seipp, Note 3); impulse gratification

(Westoff, Potter, Sagi, & Mishler, 1961); value of children to the woman's personal identity (Turner & Simmors, Note 4); and finally, her rated level of happiness as a child.

Demographic measures asked of both the husband and wife included their present ages, completed educational levels, occupations, childhood family sizes, ages at marriage, income levels, number of years married, education and occupation of both parents, number of children desired at marriage, number of years their mothers worked outside the home, their religious interest level, and their job satisfaction. Husbands were also asked their birth interval in years with any younger sibling, their number of sisters, feelings of economic security, evaluation of their childhood economic situation, and whether they learned the value of saving as a child. Wives were asked how many years they worked before marriage at an outside job, and how many years since marriage; frequency of sexual intercourse; type of birth control used; level of success in planning births; feelings of economic security; family sizes of her three best friends; degree of integration of sex roles in the couple (adapted from Rainwater, 1965); intention to work in the future number of months engaged; and finally, how favorably she would react to her daughter wanting to work if she had a preschool daughter (Turner & Simmons, Note 4).

Results

Table 1 shows some characteristics of the husbands and wives in

Table 1 about here

the sample. Husbands average about 32 years of age, wives 30 years, and couples have been married for a 9-year median length. Although both husbands and wives had fathers with high school educations, wives averaged a college education and husbands had an average education that included some graduate training. While 60% of the wives are not working, husbands average about $13,000 in yearly income.

In Table 2, the correlates of the husband's reported marital adjustment

Table 2 about here

are reported, along with the same correlates after controlling for the husband's level of social desirability. The significant correlates, after control for social desirability, seem to fall largely into five categories, which can also be seen as descriptions of those who score

more highly on marital adjustment: (1) the couple is emotionally secure (low in anxiety, alienation); (2) the husband is high in job satisfaction and future economic security feelings; (3) the husband is emotionally active and expressive, the wife emotionally receptive; (4) the wife is not working; (5) the husband and wife are religious and traditional, and the wife is quiet and conventional.

In Table 3, the correlates of the wife's reported marital adjustment which are statistically significant are given, along with the significant

Table 3 about here

remaining after controlling for the wife's social desirability score. These correlates also fell into five categories, suggesting the following situation typifying a couple where the wife reports higher marital adjustment: (1) the couple is emotionally secure; (2) the husband is high in socioeconomic status, thus the wife feels economically secure; (3) the husband is emotionally expressive, the wife receptive; (4) the wife is not working; (5) the husband and wife are religious and traditional, the wife quiet and conventional in values.

Some theorists (Tavris & Sadd, 1975) have suggested that greater frequency of sexual intercourse is connected with higher marital adjustment. This research, however, reports nonsignificant correlates between intercourse frequency and marital adjustment (husbands, .14; wives, .10). Also the significant correlates of intercourse frequency, as reported in Table 4, are not similar to significant correlates for

Table 4 about here

marital adjustment. Most of intercourse frequency correlates apparently relate to : (1) both spouses desiring to initiate high amounts of interaction, possibly as a carryover from having a larger number of siblings in their childhood families; (2) a traditional and dominant husband who may tend to use sexuality as a control element in the couple relationship.

Discussion

It appears that factors contributing to both companionship and instrumental marriages are represented in the groups of correlations reported in this study. Three of the correlate groups relate more to

instrumental values: socioeconomic status and job security relationships; the wife's not working; and the husband and wife being religious-traditional in values and the wife quiet and conventional. The two other groups of correlations for each spouse seem to relate more to a companionship marriage: (1) the couple being emotionally secure, and (2) the husband being emotionally expressive, the wife emotionally receptive.

Becuase this research was done in a changing, but still fairly traditional, southeastern city, it may be no surprise that happier marriages are those where wives are not working, where husbands and wives are traditional in values and sex role expectations, and where wives are religious and quiet. It may be that these are so close to traditional role expectations that men and women look down on spouses who violate their role expectations, with resultant lowered marital happiness.

The other three correlate groups are interesting in terms of their implications. The possible link between the husband's socio-economic status and the wife's economic security offers some support for the theory of Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1976). That emotionally secure couples seem to have more well-adjusted marriages seems reasonable. The third correlate group suggests that husbands should be emotionally expressive to contribute to a happier marriage, something which belies the inexpressive male stereotype. However, Balswick and Peek (1971) suggest that husbands in present day marriages, many of which they see as a companionship type, need to be expressive with their wives, and this research reaffirms that idea.

This research also offers little support for the idea (Tavris & Sadd, 1975) that sexual intercourse frequency correlates positively with marital adjustment, or for Westoff's (1974) idea that coital frequency is related positively to a wife's educational level, her more modern gender role attitudes, her working for a reason other than money, or her serious interest in careers.

Because the sample studied here is relatively small and restricted in age, class, and race, the results from it must be considered highly speculative. But, if these results are used to initiate hypotheses to be tested on a larger scale, they may prove interesting and useful.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Variables	Men			Women		
	Median	No.	%	Median	No.	%
Age (years)	32.00			30.05		
Marriage length	9.20					
Marriage age	23.11			21.70		
Father's education						
0-11 years		12	34		14	40
12 years		7	20		9	25
13-15 years		8	22		5	14
16 years		2	5		1	2
17+ years		5	14		6	17
Education						
0-11 years		0	0		1	3
12 years		3	9		9	24
13-15 years		8	21		7	21
16 years		8	24		8	24
17+ years		16	45		10	27
Income						
0-5,000		4	11		21	61
6,000-10,000		7	20		8	23
11,000-15,000		11	31		6	14
16,000-20,000		7	20			
21,000+		6	17			
Actual family size						
0		6	17			
1		14	41			
2		11	32			
3		4	8			

Table 2

Significant Correlates of Husband's Marital Adjustment, With and Without Control for Social Desirability

Variable	Correlation	Correlation controlling for social desirability
Couple's Marital Adjustment	.92***	.92***
Wife's Marital Adjustment	.71***	.71***
Role Integration	.55***	.58***
Husband-Wife Religious Differences	-.54***	-.50***
Wife's Father's Occupation	.46***	.47***
Husband's Belief in Importance of Having Children	.46***	.42**
Husband's Alienation Feelings	-.42**	-.39**
Couple Combined Female Stereotype Self-Concept Scale Score	.40**	.38**
Wife's Control Expressed (FIRO-B)	-.40**	-.37**
Husband's Feelings of Economic Security in the Future	.38**	.34**
Wife's Income	-.38**	-.29*
Husband's Anxiety Level	-.35**	-.34**
Husband's Female Stereotype Self-Concept Scale Score	.34*	.32*
Wife's Impulsiveness	-.34*	-.34**
Husband's Affection Expressed	.34*	.31*
Wife's Affection Wanted	.34*	
Husband's Job Satisfaction	.34*	
Wife's percentage of time worked since marriage	-.32*	-.29*
Husband's Religious Importance	.32*	.29*
Wife's Income as a Percentage of her husband's income	-.30*	
Husband's Inclusion Expressed	.29*	

***$p<.01$ **$p<.05$ *$p<.10$, all two-tailed tests

Table 3

Significant Correlates of Wife's Marital Adjustment, With and Without Control for Social Desirability

Variable	Correlation	Correlation controlling for social desirability
Couple's Marital Adjustment	.92***	.91***
Husband's Marital Adjustment	.71***	.71***
Role Integration	.63***	.56***
Wife's Control Expressed (FIRO-B)	-.57***	-.47***
Wife's Job Status	-.54***	-.41**
Wife's Anxiety Level	-.50***	-.38**
Wife's Income as a Percentage of her husband's income	-.51***	-.41**
Wife's percentage of time worked since marriage	-.48***	-.36**
Number of Months Couple was engaged	-.47***	-.36**
Husband-Wife Religious Differences	-.46***	-.48***
Wife's Father's Occupation	.45***	.44***
Wife's Income	-.45***	-.41**
Husband's Belief in Importance of Having Children	.45***	.31*
Husband's Anxiety Level	-.43**	-.38**
Wife's Impulsiveness	-.41**	-.48***
Wife's Social Desirability	.41**	
Wife's Present Economic Security	.38**	.32*
Husband's View That a Woman's Place is in the Home	.38**	
Husband's Affection Expressed	.37**	.47***
Wife's Affection Wanted	.35**	.32*
Husband's Control Wanted	-.35**	-.35**
Husband's Inclusion Expressed	.32*	.33*
Husband's Income	.31*	
Wife's Contemporary View of Women's Roles Scale	-.29*	-.30*
Husband's Religious Importance	.29*	.36**
Couple Combined Female Stereotype Self-Concept Scale Score		.41**
Husband's Educational Level		.31*
Husband's Affection Wanted		.32*

***$p < .01$ **$p < .05$ *$p < .10$, all two-tailed tests

Table 4

Significant Correlates of Couples' Sexual Intercourse Frequency

Variable	Correlation
Husband's Affection Wanted	-.37**
Husband's Childhood Family Size	.37**
Wife's Childhood Family Size	.35**
Interchange Compatability on Inclusion	.34*
Wife's Feminine Stereotyped Self-Concept	-.34*
Husband's Educational Level	.34*
Husband's Additional Number of Children Wanted	-.32*
Husband's Verbal Dominance	.30*
Number of Months Couple was Engaged	.30*
Wife's Dogmatism	-.29*
Husband's View that Couples Should Have Children	.29*
Originator Compatability on Inclusion	-.28*

**$p < .05$ *$p < .10$, all two-tailed tests